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ROMANIA LOCAL GOVERNANCE BRIDGE PROGRAM

FINAL REPORT

OCTOBER 15, 2005

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Romania Local Governance Bridge Program
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ACRONYMS

AASMR	Association of Municipal Chief Architects
ACoR	Association of Communes of Romania
ADECJR	Association of Economic Directors from the County Councils of Romania
AMR	Association of Municipalities of Romania
ANCIC	National Association of Citizen Information Centers
ANIAP	National Association of IT Specialists from Public Administration
AOR	Association of Romanian Towns
CIC	Citizen Information Center
EU	European Union
IPP	Institute for Public Policy
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
OCAT	Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the activities undertaken by ARD, Inc. under the Romania Local Governance Bridge Program. The approach to the program, the activities, the results, and deliverables are presented only to give an overview of the breadth of activity and accomplishments. For a more comprehensive understanding, the reader is referred to the individual reports that are listed. The administrative procedures and issues are discussed separately and for more information in this area, the reader is referred to the Monthly Reports which were submitted to USAID.

APPROACH AND ACTIVITIES

This nine-month contract was a part of the U.S. assistance program in support of the USAID/Romania Program Strategic Objective SO 2.3 “Improved Democratic Governance at the local level.” It was a bridge between the failed GRASP program which was terminated early (December 2004) and a follow-on program which was being designed at the same time this contract was implemented, but this contractor was prohibited from participating in the design effort in any way. The bridging activity was facilitated in the startup by being able to build on some of the activities of a two-month “rapid response” task order in local government implemented by ARD and by earlier USAID activities in Romania, particularly the GRASP grants program.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (TASK I)

The contract provided for a relatively comprehensive program of activities. It required that technical assistance be provided to six different cities (later reduced to five) in five different subject areas. The assistance had to be designed and delivered to each city to meet its specific needs in at least two or more subject areas. Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) were negotiated and signed with each city, outlining their responsibilities and the responsibilities of ARD. Following negotiation of the MOUs, scopes of work were developed in cooperation with each city for each task. These activities were phased in over the life of the project. ARD had hoped in the beginning to develop these quickly to meet the demanding timeframe in which we were required to implement the task order. (The team had only 8 ½ months from contract signing until close-out. January was lost to mobilization and startup. ARD was advised that July and August would be difficult periods to work because of the holiday season, and September had to be programmed to close out everything.) Unfortunately, ARD's urgency was not shared by the municipal governments, where all decisions are made by the mayor.

The first short-term technical assistance activities started in February and took advantage of pre-contract discussions in which a couple of the municipalities were able to articulate specific needs which could be addressed with technical assistance. Some scopes of work were developed early but could only be implemented in late April, or in one case July, because it takes three or four months to find a window of availability for good people with experience in Romania and the technical expertise required. In other cases, it took months to schedule appointments with the mayors or to get their feedback or reactions to draft scopes of work. In one municipality, the mayor was not prepared to discuss the second task until the first had been completed, which was the beginning of August.

While the contract described the technical assistance and grants activities as completely separate, ARD decided early on to program them to support and complement each other wherever possible. This worked particularly well in addressing the issues: financial analysis and creditworthiness, city management, and metropolitan area development.

In spite of the constraints, the team was able to program and implement over 200 person-days of technical assistance to five municipalities. (The Municipality of Bucharest was dropped because they were undergoing elections for a new mayor for the first four months of the project, and the complexities of dealing with this capital city prohibited attempts to integrate them into the second half of this short local government effort.) The technical assistance covered all five areas specified in the contract (as well as a couple others that were indicated as possibilities):

- Public Administration Information Technology
- Municipal Citizen Information Centers
- Municipal Finance
- Urban Planning and Metropolitan Area Management
- City Management.

THE FIVE MUNICIPALITIES

There was some commonality among the five municipalities in terms of their interest and ability to use assistance, but each had its own particular needs. There were also commonalities in constraints in dealing with them. That they are all large municipalities with populations ranging from approximately 300,000 to 450,000 contributed significantly to the difficulty of working with them. The structure and culture of local administration in Romania is highly centralized with the mayors making almost all decisions. Only in a few instances was the team advised that they could work with someone at a lower level and, in most of these, the assigned person had a liaison role and was unwilling to make any decisions. However, not only are these mayors busy managing their municipalities, but they are also very involved in national party politics. They were also preoccupied with the issues of accession into the European Union scheduled for 2007. They were selected by USAID because they represent different regions and different parties, but they are all polished politicians, quick to accept any offer of assistance, promise cooperation, and worry about the details and implications later. When the assistance offered turns out not to include any construction, commodities, or cash—only advice, it is not surprising to see the “project” drop way down on the priorities list. On the positive side, there is still considerable appreciation for the leadership role USAID has played in providing assistance to local governments and a desire for U.S. technology.

In **Iasi**, the municipality asked for and was provided assistance in creditworthiness analysis of the municipality as they are planning to significantly increase borrowing to finance several development programs. The technical assistance team used the material developed by previous USAID projects and assisted the municipality in undertaking a more thorough analysis of their finances—particularly their accounts payable, their contingent liabilities, and their risk factors from changes in the economy and from policy changes beyond their control or influence. They also developed a budget projection model and a loan analysis tool for projecting and comparing various loan options. For details, see the reports *Assessing the Borrowing Capacity of the Municipality of Iasi* and *Romania User Manual for Financial Analysis Tool*.

The second activity in Iasi focused on organizational management, communications, and IT solutions. The assistance focused on an analysis of interdepartmental communications and cooperation issues to determine the needs from the perspective of the staff and to build support for the eventual implementation of improved communications and information sharing. The staff responded positively, but the work was cut short by the municipality when the staff were called away from the agreed-upon workshop schedule to attend another staff function with the mayor and the Iasi IT Specialist as the consultant to provide more analysis in support of their planned fiber optic wide area network that they want to install. For details, see *Report to Iasi to Find an Organizational and IT Solution for Real-Time Flow of Information between Departments*.

In **Bacau**, the assistance initially focused on the Citizen Information Center (CIC) which was a high priority for them and the only clear development activity for which technical assistance appeared likely to be effective and efficient. The ARD consultant for this activity had been involved in the development of CICs in Romania since their initiation eight years ago in a previous USAID project. He was able, with intermittent assistance over three months, to help them understand what was needed, organize and budget for the operation of the CIC, select and assign staff, and train them in the initial operations. He also facilitated their visits to an operating center similar to what they needed and appropriate training. For details, see the *Bacau Citizen Information Progress Report*.

With the CIC up and running, the municipality requested additional assistance focused on interdepartmental communications and IT applications. One specific part of this was assistance to the Department of Taxes and

Fees to help them more effectively use their existing hardware and software. For details, see the reports *Bacău Review of Current IT Capability and Outline Plan for IT Development* and *Findings and Recommendations for the Bacău Department of Taxes and Fees, An Assessment of Its Needs for Streamlining Document Flow in the Municipality of Bacău*. Unfortunately, the follow-up recommended in the reports, which ARD was prepared to assist with, could not be implemented. The mayor's attention was required to deal with the flood the municipality experienced, and the finance staff time was taken up in dealing with the auditors and lawyers who were working on the corruption case of the previous mayor.

In **Cluj**, the assistance focused on traffic and parking, and on the development of the city manager position. The parking and traffic work replaced the parking and housing work proposed in the scope of work. The consultant team provided guidance on how parking problems could be approached as well as some specific suggestions that would add nearly 100 spaces near city hall for the cost of a little paint. Traffic problems were analyzed and recommendations were provided for a specific area and for the city in general. The specifics included a simple survey technique and mapped recommendations for four streets to improve flow. For the broader problems, the consultant noted that only limited improvements are possible in the old part of the city and those will require some people to give up their preferred route and access to the main road. The consultant was to explain this to the city in a press briefing/conference to help engage the community in the solution and to take some of the pressure off of the mayor. Unfortunately, the press conference was not held due to a scheduling error by the municipality. In reviewing the traffic and parking situation, problems with infrastructure management were also noted and recommendations that might save up to 60 percent of the street repaving budget were detailed in the report (see *Cluj-Napoca Traffic, Parking and Infrastructure Report*).

The mayor of Cluj has initiated the creation of the city manager position in local administration in Romania and has given this function partially to the director of the Technical Department. He asked for assistance to further develop and implement the concept and position. While the American “manager council” form of city government does not seem to be favored or recommended by anyone for Romania given the current structure and relationship of the council to the mayor and the citizens, there are aspects that are desirable, especially if it would free the mayors from some of their current excess administrative responsibility. The consultant met with the mayor and municipal staff, and they concurred that the current need is to get the MAI to draft and support an amendment to the law(s) that would give mayors the option for such a position (see the report on *Director General De Primarie (City Manager) Model*. Progress and impact of the technical assistance in Cluj on all issues was constrained by the fact that the mayor is also the president of the Democratic Party, one of the members of the ruling coalition.

In **Ploiesti**, the mayor was interested in the development of a metropolitan authority to manage the growth in this fastest-growing county of Romania (excluding Bucharest) and in the development of the city manager position. His support for introducing the same reform as the mayor of Cluj (i.e., the city manager position) is interesting because it is hard to imagine two mayors who have less in common: they are from staunchly opposing parties, the PD and the PSD; one has been mayor for over 12 years, the other is serving his first term; one is from Transylvania and the other is from Prahova valley; and one thinks experimentation with the position can go forward immediately, while the other thinks changing the law is the first thing needed. In any case, both agreed that the focus of ARD should be on encouraging the Ministry of Administration to change the law and concurrently examining the practical implementation issues that municipalities that want to change would have to address (see Scott Johnson's report on *Director General De Primarie (City Manager) Model*). The Ministry of Administration has now included authority for the position in the newly proposed Law on Local Public Administration, and a local think tank is working with the mayors through the Association of Municipalities to create the city manager position in Romania. (This final effort is being supported by a grant under this program and is described in more detail elsewhere.)

The development of the metropolitan authority got started later than the other technical assistance activities because ARD, USAID, Ploiesti, and the Municipal Architects Association all agreed that it would be best to build on the earlier successful effort in Oradea, Romania—if possible, with the same consultants. The

consultants agreed, but the earliest they could start was July. In Ploiesti, the difficulties with last year's change in mayors in the surrounding towns and communes (now from the opposition party) have reduced the willingness to cooperate as well as the trust that is essential for significant reforms. A strategy was developed for an incremental approach, solving specific problems across relatively fewer borders until trust is established. The technical assistance was divided into two parts, with the second part being implemented in the final week of the contract. The work is described in the Trip Report by John Driscoll as "to help the Municipality of Ploiesti to define a strategic approach to implementing metropolitan development—spatial and metropolitan governance."

This technical assistance was also integrated into the Municipal Architects Association's development of guidelines for metropolitan development. This activity is discussed in the final report of the association on their grant.

Pitesti is the municipality where ARD started first and finished last in developing the scopes of work. Initially, like Iasi, there priority was creditworthiness analysis. The consultants who undertook this task received excellent cooperation and support from the municipal economic director and staff. Because of their cooperation, they were able to take the specific work they did for Pitesti and Iasi and convert it into a generic financial analysis and modeling tool written in Microsoft Excel format. Coincidentally, the economic director is also president of the Municipal Economic Directors Association, which was eligible for grant support under the Romania Local Governance Bridge Program through ARD. They were able to take the work of the ARD technical assistance consultants and make it available through training to over 50 municipalities. As a result, these municipalities have responded very positively to the association for providing a useful product to the members. For the analysis of Pitesti, see *Assessing the Borrowing Capacity of the Municipality of Pitesti, Romania*, and for the Financial Analysis Tool, contact the Association of Municipal Economic Directors or see the *Romania User Manual for Financial Analysis Tool*.

The second technical assistance activity for Pitesti was very slow to get started. Apparently the mayor was waiting to see how well the first task was done before he invested any time or staff in a second task. With the completion of the first task, he was very complimentary toward the project and ARD, and asked us to assist him in developing performance indicators that would help track the completion of assigned tasks, responses to citizens, and initiatives for each of the municipality's departments and sections. Unfortunately, the request came so late in the project that the team was not able to complete the task. The team, however, did prepare a background paper and scope of work which may be used by the municipality to hire a local consultant to develop the needed database and reporting system.

GRANTS PROGRAM

The grants program, in retrospect, is surprisingly the most productive activity of this “bridging” program. The contract calls for two types of grants. The first group was a set of nine grants with an eligible, unexpended amount from the GRASP program that could be funded subject to ARD’s review and due diligence assessment of the grantees meeting the minimum capacity to manage the funds to be provided. The second, larger set of funds was for new initiatives and covered a wide range of possibilities. There were good reasons in the beginning to doubt that this program could be successfully implemented. A review of the experience of the previous project, discussions with the staff, and review of the reports all indicated that the potential grantees lacked capacity and performed poorly. Many of the associations are controlled by politicians in a society where the reduction in corruption in local administration is cited as one of the critical development constraints (see EU Accession Regular Reports). The previous project had required a year and a half to make any association grants, and the Romania Local Governance Bridge Program had to be completed in half that time. The “new initiatives” component looked a lot like the GRASP “bright ideas” grants, and in two years, they had only received one marginally acceptable proposal.

THE APPROACH

By the end of January, ARD knew there were institutional capacity issues with respect to GRASP grantees and that these were the key local government associations that USAID wanted to support. The team knew from meeting with a few grantees that their relations with the previous contractor were characterized by hostility and a general lack of trust and respect. The team knew that if they were going to develop, implement, and close out a grants program in eight months, they would have to move very quickly. They would have to establish a basis for common understanding of what was important, what was minimally required, and how they would work together toward shared development goals.

The team developed a set of procedures, a grants manual, and a standard grant format based on ADS 303 and quickly received USAID approval to proceed. They started by meeting with each grantee and explaining that they were interested in helping them to “complete their program.” They explained that they understood the situation may have changed or they might have learned something that would enable them to be more effective or efficient, and assured them that they understood and were prepared to be flexible. The team then asked them to submit a simple application identifying the problem, the proposed results, the deliverables, and the activity plan to achieve the results. They told them their budget should be clear and consistent with the planned activity and encouraged them to include what was required to complete or to logically and efficiently complement their original planned results. As the program evolved and the technical assistance program took shape, the team also worked with the grantees to take advantage of and complement the technical assistance efforts.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATIONS

The focus on helping them implement *their program* appeared in retrospect to make a significant difference in helping the team establish a proper relationship with the grantees. It was not always easy as many of the proposals were poorly written. Where the objectives and the activities generally made sense, the team worked with them to get their applications up to minimally acceptable standards. The budgets were nearly always reasonable in terms of the amount requested and the types of things they proposed to finance. However, the budgets often failed to include expenses for important activities and the team found themselves in most cases

negotiating the budget upward to make sure that it would be adequate. In one case, a municipal IT director representing the association presented their budget, prepared on an Excel spreadsheet, with substantial internal calculation errors that were obvious in a quick review. Two more tries and the budget was finally internally consistent and accurate. In the end, all GRASP grantees except one received a grant. Only the Municipal Secretaries professional body failed to put together a simple coherent set of activities with a corresponding budget.

All grant activities were completed in August. Nine Local Government Associations and the Institute for Public Policy all *successfully completed the programs* for which they applied for grants. This is somewhat surprising and significant in view of the short period of the grants and weak staff resources of the associations. Only AMR and IPP had more than two full-time paid staff at the beginning of this contract. Some of the professional bodies only have paid staff when they have a USAID grant.

The two grantees with staff resources submitted applications in early February and were awarded grants by the end of February. Most of the others had more difficulty putting together a simple, coherent three-page proposal and budget, and were not awarded their grants until April and May. The last grant was awarded to the Association of Communes at the end of July to provide support for the Association of Communes, Towns, and Municipalities. This was the second grant to the Association of Communes which was selected for this from among all the associations; Municipalities, Towns and Communes, because they had, by far, demonstrated the best planning, program management, and financial reporting of the three associations.

The GRASP completion grants evolved into the following achievements.

IPP Institute for Public Policy (first grant for HR management)

- Elaboration of the Best Practice Guide for HR directors from the Romanian County Councils.
- Elaboration of the Policy Paper for civil service reform.

Association of Romanian Municipalities – Economic Directors Professional Body

- Held the first General Assembly of Economic Directors Professional Body in three years and introduced the Creditworthiness Analysis Tool and Model.
- Completed training for 40 municipalities on the Financial Analysis Tool.

ANIAP (National Association of IT Specialists from Public Administration)

- Published their methodological guide for IT project management.
- Published the brochure of successful projects for printing.

ADECJR (Association of Economic Directors from the County Councils of Romania)

- Held six county seminars on Financial Management for communes.
- Updated the manual with the latest in the Law on Public Procurement.

Association of Chief Architects from County Councils of Romania

- Published their Guide for Commune Technicians responsible for Urban Planning.

AMR (Association of Municipalities of Romania)

- Completed implementation of their mass mail project.
- Continued work on local councils and best practices databases.

ANCIC (National Association of Citizen Information Centers)

- Held training for new CICs in Bacau, Cluj, and Cimpina.
- Held National CIC conference and updated Web site.

AASMR (Association of Municipal Chief Architects)

- Assisted Ploiesti with their metropolitan development planning.
- Workgroups met in Sibiu and Tirgu Mares on Metropolitan Development.
- Printed the guide on creating metropolitan areas in county capitals.

The completion of unfinished GRASP business also included the payment of vouchers for seven municipalities that had been approved by DAI but which were not paid because the work had not been completed. After discussing the voucher program with DAI staff who implemented the program, the team was prepared to respond if required, but it was clear that this activity had been management-intensive and the expected impact was minimal. None of the outstanding vouchers appeared to have anything to do with the other Bridge activities and USAID finally dropped this activity from the contract.

NEW INITIATIVE GRANTS

The second category of Grants fell under the new initiatives component of the project. The development of this component of the project evolved in a way that was quite different from what was initially envisioned. During the first months, while the team focused on getting the completion grants up and running as well as the technical assistance to the municipalities, they noticed that a number of potential decentralization and local governance issues needed to be addressed. With a very small staff and only a few months of operating time, it was obvious that they would have to focus their energies on the policy and legislative reform area that the new initiative grants and subcontracts were to address. The continuing issue in all of their discussions with local officials was the lack of consultation between the central government and the local governments.

The central government had made commitments to both the World Bank and EU that they would reform local government administration before the fall of 2005. Both the Ministry of Administration and Ministry of Finance approached USAID in March and asked if ARD could provide assistance. In discussions with both Ministries, they responded positively to ARD's observation that the consultation process with local governments was not effective and our suggestion that the team focus on supporting a consultation process of dialogue aimed at achieving consensus.

ARD presented a plan of action to USAID at the end of March 2005 that would support consultation between the central government and local governments focused on three issues, each with its own law to be revised; 1) Decentralization Strategy and the Decentralization Framework Law 339/2004, 2) Local Public Finance and EO45/2003, and 3) Local Public Administration Law 215. The interested Ministries were Finance and Administration. The implementation modality included technical assistance, facilitating a workshop involving participation of LGU and Ministry representatives, and providing grants to associations allowing them to organize both their internal study of the issues and consultation among members and with the central government.

On the broad decentralization issues and the related laws, ARD provided assistance to both the MAI and the Association of Municipalities, Towns, and Communes. The direct support to the MAI included a local consultant to work with the Secretary of State and Central Unit for Public Administration Reform, and a U.S. decentralization expert on Decentralization Strategy. The local consultant's program and the scope of work for technical assistance were jointly agreed to by USAID, the Ministry, and ARD. The World Bank representatives joined in and supported this effort. Their work is covered in the reports: *Decentralization Strategy and Analytical Framework*, *Report Reviewing Draft Decentralization Legislation*, and *Final Consultant Report of Casandra Bischof*.

ARD facilitated local government participation and provided local technical assistance to the Working Group on Municipal Credit, allowing them to develop proposed legislation to cover financial distress and insolvency in local governments. A Working Meeting on Decentralization Strategy was convened jointly by the Federation of Local Authorities of Romania and the Ministry of Administration in June for which ARD provided logistic support, the Keynote Speaker, and facilitation services.

Four grants were awarded under this component, three of which had significant involvement of local and central government officials and addressed important legislative and policy reforms. These included the following.

AOR (Association of Romanian Towns)

- Drafted amendments of Law 416 on Minimum Guaranteed Income.
- Held meetings with the Ministries of Finance, Labor and Administration and successfully presented the proposed amendments of Law 416 to the Minister.

ACoR (Association of Communes of Romania)

- Held Institutional Development meetings with the communes of 14 counties to increase membership, discuss reforms needed in the Local Public Administration Law, and discuss how to access development funds.

IPP II (Institute for Public Policy Grant on “City Manager”)

- Drafted amendment to the Law on Public Administration to make the position of “city manager” or “general director” optional.
- Held meetings and issued press releases on the advantages of “professionalizing” local government administration and developed a guide for future action.

ACoR II (Association of Communes of Romania)

- Reviewed draft legislation on local public finance and administration and consultation with MAI. The AMR, AOR, and ACoR members including both mayors and key professional staff met, association by association, to review the draft changes. (The principal result of this effort is a set of laws that have benefited from extensive consultation and they now have a broad base of support. The final drafts are to be completed by September 30, 2005 for submission to the government and then the Parliament.)

For a more complete picture of the activities or accomplishments of any one of or all the grants, see *Final Report on Romania Local Governance Bridge Program Grants*, which includes the final report by each grantee on their activities, results, and deliverables. There is also an assessment of each grantee by the ARD Romanian Local Government Specialist who monitored and assisted the grantee.

INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT OF GRANTEES (TASK 3)

The contract calls for two forms of assessment. The first, a pre-grant, due diligence assessment in accordance with ADS 303, was completed for each grantee and is recorded in the grant file.

A second assessment based on observations of the work, the grantees' performance, and institutional capacity is required and was carried out in July, August, and September. A participatory process using the PACT Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool (OCAT) was used for this assessment.

A meeting was held with all of the association grantees participating in the Bridge Project to present the Institutional Assessment task and solicit their participation. All indicated a keen interest in participating, promised cooperation in the interview phase, and asked to be included in the final workshop. Interviews were scheduled and held with officers, members, and staff of all associations. Where possible, interviews were held in conjunction with ongoing workshops and seminars sponsored by ARD under the individual grants. This was the only practical way to cover the number of people needed to get a representative sample from each association.

All associations were invited to attend a final meeting at which the draft assessment was provided for comment and all were encouraged to use the information and the opportunity to identify important areas in which they would like to improve and to begin to develop an action plan. All of the associations evaluated themselves higher than the ARD evaluators had rated them, but most agreed that the OCAT tool was useful and that future assessments should use the same tool to measure changes over time. The assessments of each and general comments are included in one comprehensive report: *Institutional Assessment of Romania Local Governance Bridge Program Grantees: The Organizational Capacity of the Associative Structures of Local Public Administration in Romania*.

ANNEX I

Significant Reports Produced by ARD under the Romania Local Governance Bridge Contract in Cooperation with Selected Local Governments and the Members and Officers of the Associations of Local Government in Romania

1. Decentralization Strategy. A Framework for Analysis: by Larry Schroeder (English & Romanian)
2. Institutional Assessment of Romania Local Governance Bridge Program Grantees: *The Organizational Capacity of the Associative Structures of Local Public Administration in Romania*
3. Users' Manual for Financial Analysis Tool: (English & Romanian)
 - a. Excel Financial Accounts Generic
 - b. Excel Financial Accounts Trend
 - c. Excel Financial Model
4. An Assessment of it Needs for Streamlining Document Flow in The Municipality of Bacau
5. Findings and Recommendations for the Bacau Department of Taxes and Fees
6. A Review of Current IT Capability and Outline Plan for IT Development in Bacau
7. Bacau Citizen Information Center Progress Report
8. Cluj-Napoca Traffic, Parking and Infrastructure Report
 - a. Cluj-Napoca Traffic, Parking and Infrastructure - Power Point Presentation
9. An Organizational and IT Solution for Real-time Flow of Information Between Departments for the Municipality of Iasi (Eng & Romanian)
10. Assessing the Borrowing Capacity of the Municipality of Pitesti, Romania (English & Romanian)
11. Assessing the Borrowing Capacity of the Municipality of Iasi, Romania (English & Romanian)
12. Report on City Manager Model – prepared by Scott Johnson (English & Romanian)
13. Municipality of Pitesti: Building a Simple Task Tracking/Management Database
14. Report Reviewing Draft Decentralization Legislation: by Larry Schroeder
15. Defining A Strategic Approach Metropolitan Development For Ploiesti
16. Work Plan and Implementation Schedule
17. Monthly Reports; January to August 2005

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